

Message Text

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ACTION NEA-10

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-04 H-02 INR-07 L-03

NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15 OMB-01 /052 W

----- 116676

R 200550Z DEC 75

FM AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 2952

USIA WASHDC

INFO AMCONSUL BOMBAY

AMCONSUL CALCUTTA

AMCONSUL MADRAS

LIMITED OFFICIAL USE NEW DELHI 17010

E.O. 11652: N/A

TAGS: PFOR, PINS, IN

SUBJECT: INDIAN PRESS CONTROLS. PRESS REACTION TO NEW ORDINANCES
FROM THE LEFT.

REF: NEW DELHI 16487-C

1. IT IS SIGNIFICANT THAT THE PRO-MOSCOW WEEKLY BLITZ OF
DECEMBER 20 DEVOTES TWO FULL PAGES LAUNCHING A CAMPAIGN
AGAINST THE RECENTLY PROMULGATED PRESS ORDINANCE.

2. IN THE CAPITAL CLOSE-UP COLUMN ENTITLED "PRESS UNDER
PREVENTIVE DETENTION?", A. RAGHAVAN HIT HARD BY COMMENTING
THAT "THE JOURNALIST COMMUNITY AND MOST OF ITS AUDIENCE ARE
MORTIFIED BY THE TRIPLE ORDINANCES." HE REFERRED
TO SOME OF THE COURT JUDGMENTS INVOLVING FREEDOM OF THE
PRESS AND QUOTED PRESS COMMISSIONS WHICH RECOGNIZED THAT
DEMOCRACY "THRIVES UNDER THE VIGILANT EYE OF THE LEGISLATOR
AS ALSO UNDER THE GLARE OF PUBLIC OPINION CHANNELLED BY THE
PRESS."

3. ADMITTING THE PARLIAMENTARY PROCEEDINGS ACT HAD BEEN
"GROSSLY MISUED," RAGHAVAN ASSERTED THAT ITS REPEAL IS
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"A DISASTER TO JOURNALISM AND DEMOCRACY." BUT THE "REAL

ANTI-PRESS MISSILE" IS THE PREVENTION OF PUBLICATION OF
OBJECTIONABLE MATTER ORDINANCE BECAUSE "THIS IS TOO WIDE
A NET IN WHICH ANYBODY CAN BE CAUGHT FOR ANYTHING
DEPENDING UPON THE WHIMS AND FANCIES OF GOI OFFICIALS".
IN CONCLUSION HE SAID THE ORDINANCES "CAME LIKE A
CLOUDBURST." "CONSULTATIONS WITH INTERESTED PARTIES
WERE PERFUNCTORY." HE DENOUNCED THE GOVERNMENT FOR
DISPATCHING THE ORDINANCES BY A FAST JET TO CAIRO TO
GET THE ASSENT OF THE PRESIDENT.

4. EXPRESSING HIS REACTION, G.N. ACHARYA IN HIS COLUMN
"DEAD LAW REVIVED TO SHACKLE PRESS" SAID "I AM SHOCKED,
DISILLUSIONED, DISTRESSED" BECAUSE THE PRESS ORDINANCES
"OUTRAGE MY PROFESSIONAL CONSCIENCE." HE ARGUED THAT
NO "TRUE DEMOCRACY WOULD BE SO AFRAID TO SEEK TO CRIPPLE
THE POWER OF THE PRESS TO PERFORM THIS DUTY IN ALL THE
FULLNESS. HE CATEGORICALLY ASSERTED THAT "THE NEW LAWS
MAKE THE POSITION OF THOSE OF US WHO HAVE BEEN CONSISTENT
SUPPORTERS OF THE PRIME MINISTER'S POLICY SINCE 1969
RIGHT THROUGH THE EMERGENCY VERY EMBARRASSING. WHEN WE
FACE THE NEXT CRITIC WE ARE BOUND TO FEEL
SHAMEFACED AND FORCED TO SAY SILENT. GUILTY SILENCE."

5. IN ITS EDITORIAL "WHITHER CONGRESS?", THE WEEKLY
DENOUNCED THE CONGRESS PARTY FOR "THE VIRTUAL PARALYSIS
THAT HAS OVERTAKEN THE PARTY FOR MANY YEARS" AND FOR ITS
"LACK OF A CLEAR VISION AND ITS FUTURE ROLE." IN PASSING
IT SAID THAT THE "INSCRUTABLE" WAYS OF THE CONGRESS PARTY
"ARE PERHAPS INFLUENCED BY THE SPIRIT OF CENSORSHIP
CURRENTLY IN FORCE."
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Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: X
Capture Date: 01 JAN 1994
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: CENSORSHIP, LAW, INFORMATION CONTROL, THE PRESS
Control Number: n/a
Copy: SINGLE
Draft Date: 20 DEC 1975
Decaption Date: 01 JAN 1960
Decaption Note:
Disposition Action: RELEASED
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Authority: MorefiRH
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 28 MAY 2004
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1975NEWDE17010
Document Source: CORE
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: n/a
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: N/A
Errors: N/A
Film Number: D750443-0620
From: NEW DELHI
Handling Restrictions: n/a
Image Path:
ISecure: 1
Legacy Key: link1975/newtext/t19751222/aaaaatab.tel
Line Count: 92
Locator: TEXT ON-LINE, ON MICROFILM
Office: ACTION NEA
Original Classification: LIMITED OFFICIAL USE
Original Handling Restrictions: n/a
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 2
Previous Channel Indicators: n/a
Previous Classification: LIMITED OFFICIAL USE
Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Reference: n/a
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Authority: MorefiRH
Review Comment: n/a
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 17 JUN 2003
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review History: RELEASED <17 JUN 2003 by BoyleJA>; APPROVED <12 AUG 2003 by MorefiRH>
Review Markings:

Margaret P. Grafeld
Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
06 JUL 2006

Review Media Identifier:
Review Referrals: n/a
Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: INDIAN PRESS CONTROLS. PRESS REACTION TO NEW ORDINANCES FROM THE LEFT.
TAGS: PFOR, PINS, IN
To: STATE USIA
Type: TE
Markings: Margaret P. Grafeld Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 06 JUL 2006